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Mentorship Gives Judges Confidence

Judicial mentorship helps both new and experienced judges alike.

Inessa Kuanova has served as a judge in the North-Kazakhstan Oblast since 1998. As a new judge, she soon became familiar with the Soviet-era system of “apprenticeship,” in which new judges are paired with senior judges in a strict and subservient relationship designed to monitor the judge’s performance. However, a new model has recently developed in Kazakhstan.



Photo: Champion

Started with support from USAID, the judicial mentorship program stresses collegiality, openness, and information-sharing. Senior judges (mentors) are still paired with new judges (protégés), but the mentality and approach is different. The objective is to give new judges a genuine mentor during the challenging early years on the bench, during which they will have to make difficult legal and moral decisions on a daily basis. And due to the open nature of the relationship, new judges pass along fresh ideas and ways of thinking to their mentors, ensuring that the judiciary as a whole is constantly infused with new thinking.

After participating in a USAID training in early 2006 which exposed her to the mentorship program, Judge Kuanova quickly established the program in her oblast. “I returned back to work full

of new ideas and started to promote this program to our newly appointed and experienced judges.” She also became a mentor herself, and is proud of her impact. “My protégé became more confident, he feels comfortable communicating with elder colleagues and his court Chair, and he is proud of decisions he makes in the courtroom.”

In September 2006, Judge Kuanova participated in another USAID training to enable her to train senior judges on how to be mentors. She now travels to other regions of Kazakhstan to expand the mentorship program. “Teaching is a complex thing, especially for the judiciary. Judges are conservative in learning new things and it is hard to make them practice new skills. USAID gave us the ability to do this though, by teaching us to train new mentors.”

“Mentoring for me means a way to utilize my own good qualities and share my experience. It’s a perfect opportunity to keep one’s mind open - I get tons of ideas from my young colleague which I never thought of.”

- judge Inessa Kuanova